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NSC BRIEFING

8 January 1954

FRENCH REACTION TO
VIET MINH OFFENSIVE

I. Official French Reaction

A. In cabinet meeting, 30 December 1953.

1. Finance Minister Edgar Faure

reportedly insisted that France
either obtain a five-power confer-
ence on the Far East or open
negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

2. Secretary for the Associated States

Jacquet told American officials
that in the cabinet meeting Reynaud
recommended the immediate adoption
of a policy of ^{PHASED} withdrawal from
Indochina. Jacquet said only
exceptional efforts by himself,

Bidault and Pleven blocked

Reynaud's move

State Department
review completed

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B. Subsequently, however, Reynaud sent his executive secretary to the American embassy to explain his position. According to his spokesman, Reynaud favors evacuation only as a last resort. Moreover, the vice premier is strongly opposed to any direct negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. Reynaud is, however, in favor of exploring every possibility of negotiations on the international level, preferably as part of any Korean political conference or, failing in that, through a five-power conference. Until negotiations are possible "under at least potentially favorable conditions," however, he supports prosecution of the war under the Navarre plan.

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C. 1. Jacquet told the American embassy in Paris on 5 January that unless "a precise plan for action" were presented within three to six months, public pressure would not permit the National Assembly to support any government not offering a prompt solution.

2. He sees three hypotheses in regard to a settlement of the Indochina war..

a. Negotiations at the international level including Communist China.

b. A military solution which can only be obtained with "massive military assistance" of its allies.

c. Negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

Jacquet does not believe it is possible for France to choose "unilaterally" one of these three possibilities. The embassy does not feel that he favors asking for American troops. If that is so, his second hypothesis (b, above) apparently refers to financial and material aid to carry out the Navarre plan.

II. French Press Reaction

Press reaction to the Viet Minh offensive comes mainly from independent leftist papers. In general, they pose the following questions in regard to French Indochina policy.

- A. If negotiations are possible in Korea, why not in Indochina?

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- B. If the Viet Minh terms make negotiations impossible, why can't France provoke internationalization of the conflict?
- C. Why should France continue to remain the exclusive champions of the defense of the free world?

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BACKGROUND

It was the Jacquet opinion (I.C, above), earlier offered to the American columnist Joseph Alsop, that appeared in American papers as a statement that the National Assembly would insist on the recall of the French expeditionary force unless allied reinforcements were provided "within the next three to six months."

Jacquet quoted Alsop as saying that if United States troops were sent to Indochina, he "wanted to take part in the campaign."

The State Department has requested for 8 January a special Paris embassy estimate of immediate French policy on Indochina, but specified that the estimate must follow the Lanier vote of confidence expected 6 January.

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